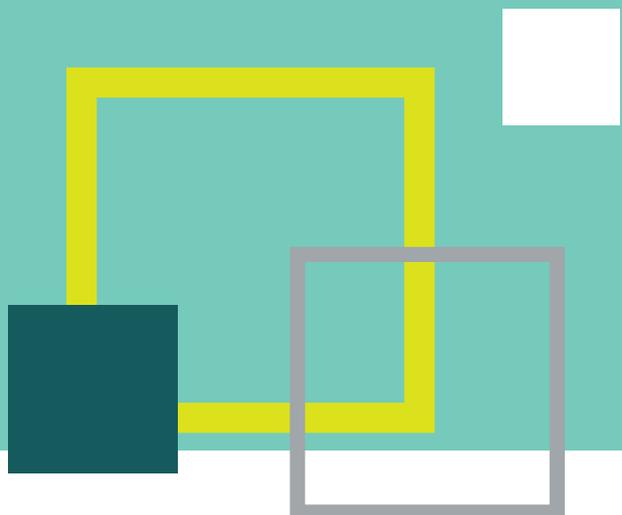


IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE VCSE

A survey of VCSE organisations in Brighton, Hove,
Adur and Worthing between June and July 2020

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THANK YOU!

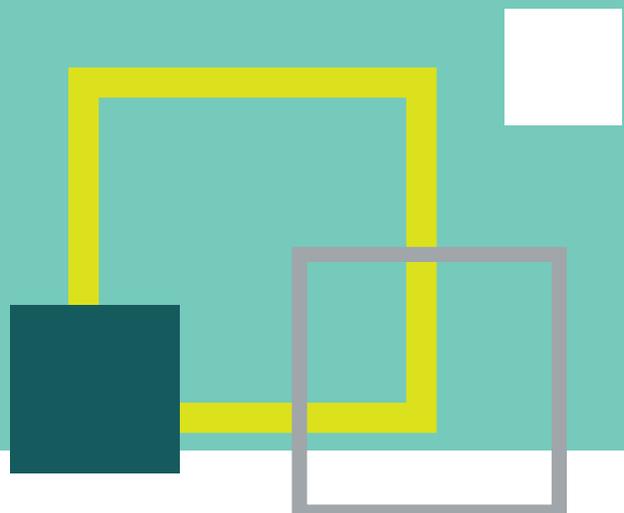
Throughout the response to Covid-19, Community Works has been, and continues to, work alongside our members, new and emerging groups, national initiatives and bodies and our statutory services. This joint working has linked the extraordinary wealth of expertise held within the VCSE across all levels, across systems.

In so doing, we have witnessed first-hand the enormous scale of the response by all sectors. We have been particularly struck by the collective strength and connectedness of the layers of the VCSE, working to and building on each other's strengths, generously sharing expertise and resources with each other and the public sector to ensure no one was left behind. The innovation, agility and resilience of our sector has been drawn upon, recognised, and highlighted through the lens of Covid-19.

Above all, this has been possible because of the passion, commitment, dedication and sheer determination of staff and volunteers across our sector doing *'what we do'*, *'setting aside team identities'* and working tirelessly to deliver what has been needed.

We acknowledge and appreciate your huge contribution.

Thank you.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is presented with thanks to our members who took time in the midst of their work on the front line, to complete the survey. There were so many of you, providing thoughtful insights, enabling a picture to be developed of the role the VCSE sector played, and continues to play, in meeting the challenges of Covid-19 and ensuring that our communities remain supported in this toughest of times.

Thanks also to sector leaders across the VCSE and public sector who contributed time to the many interviews conducted in gathering evidence and case studies.

Thanks also to:

Neil Cotton, West Sussex County Council for his thoughtful and detailed survey analysis

Rebecca Moran, for support in writing this report

Managers at Community Works for their insights and support

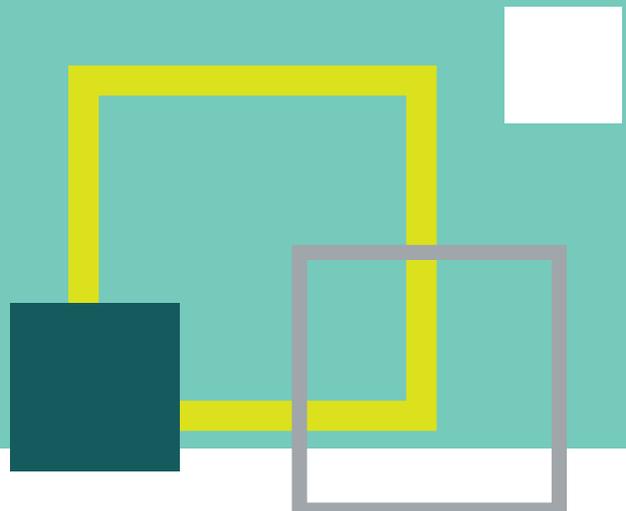
Magda Pasiut, Community Works for project administrative support

Dave Adams, Community Works for technical assistance

Jayne Ross, Community Works for project design, writing and coordination

NHS England and BHCCG for including this report as part of a wider piece of work on VCSE Leadership leading to the Sussex-wide report: Stronger Partnerships, Stronger Communities and a Stronger voluntary community and social enterprise sector (A Sussex wide review of the impact of Covid-19 on the VCSE).

Claire Gaukrodger, Gaukscreative for report design





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Between 22nd June and 13th July 2020, Community Works distributed an online survey to learn about how the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector situated within Brighton, Hove, Adur and Worthing, has responded in the initial months of the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 174 VCSE organisations and groups responded to the survey, varied by size and nature. Over half the respondents were from relatively small organisations, with 58% having '0-5 members of staff' and 55% having an income of '£100,000 or less'. 17 organisations employ over 50 people. Over half of the respondents (54%) work with '20 or more' volunteers, and a large number of responses (68%) were from registered charities.

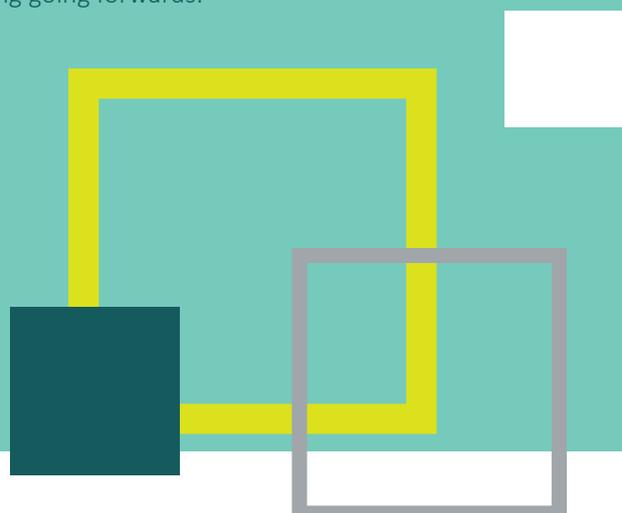
This report documents the findings from the full data set, which included a quantitative analysis of closed questions as well as the collation and thematic analysis of over 600 qualitative comments. Throughout the report, a sample of those comments are cited.

The findings are based on the collective responses of Community Works members encompassing Adur and Worthing and Brighton and Hove. Where there were significant statistical differences between the two areas, these have been highlighted but differences should be treated with an element of caution as the responses in Adur and Worthing are not statistically significant enough to draw conclusions for the whole area in themselves. The qualitative data, case studies and interviews have given us a much broader and richer assessment of what the sectors priorities are across the geographical spread. The accumulated information from these provide a strong indication of the demand for a thirst for support, networking and collaboration opportunities within the sector across Adur and Worthing and Brighton and Hove.

At the time of publishing this report, the Covid-19 pandemic is by no means over. Rather, it remains a constantly shifting and uncertain landscape, whereby the stark implications of the pandemic continue to be felt by individuals and communities, as well as within the wider social and economic context. Thus, the views and experiences of VCSE organisations are likely to shift and evolve in line with this ever-changing context.

However, this report is an ideal opportunity to pause and reflect, both on what the VCSE sector has achieved so far and to consider what has made this response possible. By doing so, the hope is that we can build on, and embed, the lessons that are being learnt and also consider how to ensure that the VCSE sector can continue to support communities and remain strong going forwards.

As a snapshot, we have preserved and used the language used by respondents in their responses. We acknowledge the challenges and importance of language, and especially terminology when talking about diversity, equality and inclusion. How we communicate effectively and appropriately about diversity, equality and inclusion is an ongoing process. We are listening and learning from members and the wider community and encourage people to share their thoughts with us.



HOW DID THE VCSE SECTOR RESPOND?

At the time of completing the survey, nearly all of the respondents (91%) were still providing services, with 69% of organisations dealing with increasing or similar levels of demand to usual¹. However, with the lockdown restrictions in place, and the risks imposed by Covid-19, organisations have had to significantly adapt their provision, including the closure of offices, moving to remote working, and reimagining of the delivery of services.

Over 137 comments were made demonstrating the various ways that VCSE organisations, very rapidly, responded to the needs of their service users and the communities they serve. For example, organisations:

- Adapted the delivery of existing services (e.g. utilising online technology, redeploying staff and volunteers and providing practical support (such as the delivery of food and meals).
- Developed new services to meet new and additional needs.
- Provided essential hardware to service users to mitigate the problems associated with digital exclusion.
- Increased the distribution and accessibility of key public health messages across all communities.
- Worked collaboratively with local, regional and national strategic partners to help shape and inform collective efforts to ensure there was a coordinated, joined up and efficient response.

¹ This was particularly the case for organisations supporting 'older people', 'people living with long term physical and mental health conditions', 'people who misuse alcohol, drugs or other substances', 'homeless people' and 'BAMER communities'.

WHAT IMPACT DID THIS RESPONSE HAVE?

VCSE organisations reflected on the positive impact they have had both on service users as well as local, collective responses. The key message coming through from the hundreds of comments made is that the VCSE sector has helped save lives, reduced loneliness and isolation, and complemented the provision of statutory services, thus preventing the 'system' from becoming overwhelmed with ever increasing need. For example, the sector has contributed to:

- Providing for the basic needs of individuals and communities.
- Increasing the awareness, accessibility, and thus adherence to, public health guidance across all communities.
- Ensuring that the social and emotional needs of the most at risk and the most isolated were actively addressed and taken into account in service design and delivery.
- Increasing community access to Personal and Protective Equipment.
- Ensuring those at risk of digital exclusion were catered for wherever possible.
- Sharing knowledge and intelligence regarding the needs of the most vulnerable community members.
- Supporting cross-sector referral pathways.
- Ensuring there are clear and open lines of communication between sectors.
- Advocating for the needs of the most vulnerable or marginalised communities.

However, despite the positive outcomes set out above, many respondents were acutely aware of the level of need that continues to exist, given the negative impacts that Covid-19 – and thus the unavoidable loss or adaption of services – continues to have on service users. The impact that existing patterns of vulnerability, marginalisation and exclusion have had on people's negative experiences of the pandemic were also widely noted.

WHAT ENABLED THE SECTOR TO RESPOND IN THIS WAY?

The VCSE sector was able to respond rapidly to the needs of individuals and communities throughout the pandemic given its:

- Trusted relationships with and closeness to service users.
- Reach into diverse communities.
- Value-driven approach.
- Committed, passionate and motivated workforce (both paid and voluntary).
- Strong governance, management and leadership structures.

- Sound financial management.
- Strength of existing relationships, and willingness to work in partnership, with statutory partners, funders and other VCSE organisations.
- Relevant, needs-led service provision.

The role that funders and infrastructure have played was also noted, ensuring organisations had access to the right support.

This combination of factors was felt to have contributed to the sector's agility, flexibility, and creativity. They also provided a basis of trust upon which VCSE organisations were able to listen to, identify, and effectively advocate for, the needs of different communities.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO ENSURE THE VCSE REMAINS STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE MOVING FORWARDS?

Alongside the positive stories of adaptation and collaboration, the sector has faced some key challenges, particularly in relation to funding, volunteering and service design. For example, 51% of respondents had experienced a loss in income, 39% have already drawn on reserves, and 44% expect to experience a loss in income over the next financial year. 46% of respondents also noted that their current delivery model was 'significantly' or 'very significantly' at risk. Whilst there was a high degree of confidence regarding the survival of VCSE organisations in the next six months, this confidence level dropped when thinking about the next 12-18 months.

In relation to volunteering, whilst many (68% of respondents) were able to maintain or increase their volunteer base, 30% experienced a decrease. This was often due to the changing nature of volunteering roles (i.e. moving to the provision of virtual support, which was a barrier for some), the suspension and closure of some volunteer led services as well as the vulnerability of some volunteers to the health implications of Covid-19.

Overall, the picture is one of significant change for the VCSE sector. As the implications of Covid-19 continue to unravel, and as contracts and grants move towards end dates, there is thus increasing concern regarding the sector's mid to long-term future.

Within this context, three priorities emerged that can support the VCSE to remain strong and sustainable at a local level and to address wide reaching inequalities:

- Supportive funding structures
- Collaborative working
- Addressing social and structural inequalities

These are explored further:

Supportive funding structures: Over three quarters of respondents called for core, unrestricted funding to ensure they can continue to be agile, flexible and offer creative solutions to meet increasing need. Core funding will provide organisations with the breathing space they need to continue to invest in service redesign, as well as their internal infrastructure, to ensure they remain strong, sustainable and networked organisations. There were a number of suggestions about funding structures as solutions to support collaborative working, namely that:

Funding structures be designed in such a way that the assets and strengths held by smaller, grassroots organisations are acknowledged and included in design and development of solutions.

Investment in preventative/early intervention services to be prioritised, with a continuing relaxation and flexibility of the 'hoops' organisations need to jump through in order to access funding.

A parity of status to be encouraged to inform funding relationships as a more collaborative process, sharing power in the funding relationship and in the design of solutions to engage those most in need, as one system.

Flexible funding with responsive measurement and evaluation to be built into funding agreements that encourage dynamic development of services using the learning through ongoing delivery².

Flexibilities to funding agreements and relationships are continued in response to reduced outputs or underspend that may arise as a direct impact of the pandemic.

Collaborative working: Throughout the survey findings, the scale and impact of collaborative working across both the VCSE and public sector is highlighted, and there is a palpable willingness for this to continue. However, to build on this progress, and to prevent it from becoming 'tokenistic', respondents called for:

Equitable, trusting relationships underpinned by transparent, open and clear lines of communication.

Involvement by statutory services of VCSE organisations from the start of the planning process, 'to work in a collegiate way, to try new approaches, listen to people'.

Principles to enhance future collaboration: flexibility in delivery and in funding; where and how development happens, in who leads and how they lead, in the ability to allow dynamic change out of shared learning.

Representation and involvement of a variety of communities and organisations in the development of strategic as well as operational models, developing experimental approaches.

Awareness, recognition and respect for each other's strengths and contribution and how the VCSE can bring community voice in different ways.

² <https://www.ivar.org.uk/research-report/trust-power-and-collaboration/>

Addressing social and structural inequalities: Respondents emphasised the need to tackle entrenched social and structural inequalities and the complexities of need which have been exacerbated by Covid-19. The collective response to the pandemic by the VCSE and statutory services rapidly identified communities, groups and individuals who needed urgent support, saving many lives and easing suffering. However, as demand for services increased, many disadvantaged communities and vulnerable people experienced heightened isolation and disadvantage. Respondents called for all stakeholders to work together to:

Establish a shared purpose between all stakeholders to address social and structural inequalities, aligning priorities through collaboration and flexible funding structures in the face of diminishing resources.

Build on the lessons that are being learnt about the significant consequences of entrenched inequality.

Use the learning to lead stakeholders as one system to examine those areas where people are disadvantaged and excluded or impacted negatively, particularly by the ways in which services and policies are developed and offered.

Include the voices of various interest groups and communities, and of those most impacted by their lived experiences, at an early stage in processes of both co-design of commissioning and co-delivery.

SUMMARY

There is a strong indication that organisations anticipate retaining many of the changes and adaptations they have made to service delivery and working practices, with many anticipating a 'blended' approach to combining new approaches to delivery with traditional ones. However, not all respondents found adaption easy or appropriate for many of their service users. There were also some respondents who did not have such a positive experience of partnership working as others.

As such, it is clear that the sector will need ongoing support from funders, commissioners, government and infrastructure organisations to ensure it can navigate, and remain strong, in this new operating context. This may involve support to:

Continue service delivery and development and support increased and new demand.

Share best practice with regards to service delivery and redesign; managing and delivering online and/or blended services.

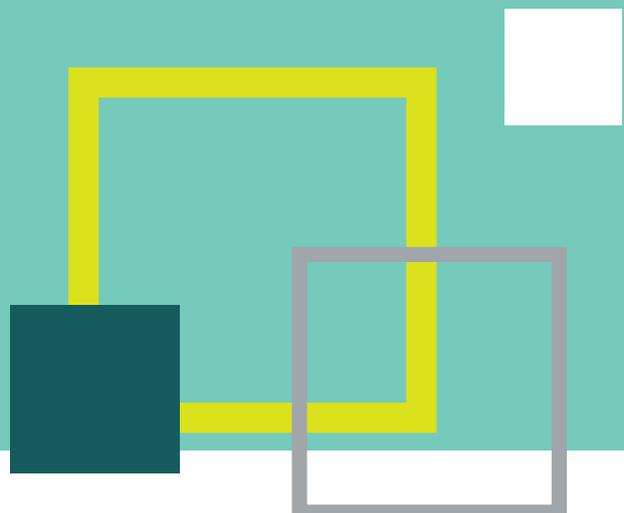
Investment for volunteering programmes.

Build on the relationships and partnerships that have been essential during this time.

Remain financially sustainable.

Demonstrate and articulate the positive impact and value of services.

Invest in the skills and expertise of its workforce (both paid and voluntary) to enable it to continue to provide high quality, and much needed, support to a diverse range of individuals and communities.



COMMUNITY WORKS – A CALL TO ACTION

The findings presented in this report set out what has been, in many ways, a humanitarian response: a response driven by the need to save lives and protect the most vulnerable in society.

This report provides substantial evidence regarding the essential and vital contribution that VCSE, in its entirety, has made and continues to do so, in providing for people's basic needs and ensuring that the physical and emotional health of individuals across all communities are considered and protected.

It provides examples and feedback that we should use to celebrate the ability of the sector to respond quickly and in new innovative ways to unprecedented challenges, alongside its statutory partners. The variety of organisations that took part in this survey, both in terms of their size and geographical spread, provide Community Works, the VCSE and our statutory sector partners, provides us with rich intelligence to shape our future work.

We recognise that different organisations in a range of locations have experienced the pandemic in a multitude of ways. There is work to do to ensure Community Works listens to all members and includes multiple perspectives when developing our plans.

We call on our partners within the VCSE and across our statutory services to work with us and each other to develop actions that urgently tackle the priorities identified within this report by:

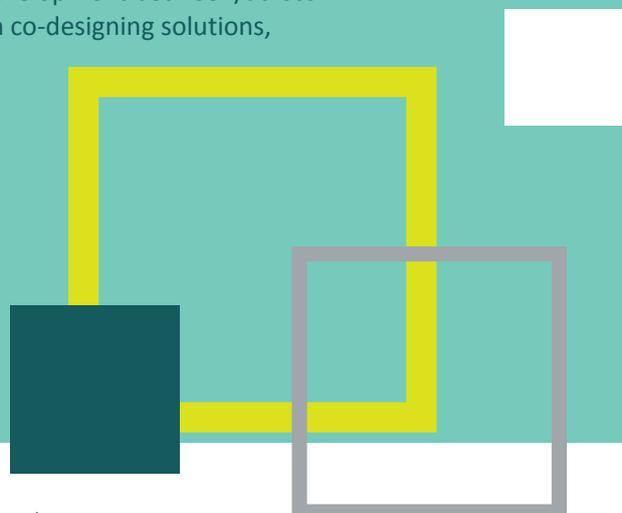
Respecting, celebrating and valuing the contribution of each sector, developing a *'shared sense of purpose to encourage a person-centred approach based on need a or and better understanding between all parties'*³.

Committing to open, honest and transparent dialogue across sectors.

Committing to social justice and equality.

Acknowledging the vital role the VCSE sector has played whilst recognising that the principle that investing in a healthy, vibrant and connected sector is essential.

To support VCSE with continued relationship development between/across sectors to encourage more 'experimentation' in co-designing solutions, pooling resources, co-designing funding/ commissioning processes.



³ Trust, power and collaboration; Human Learning Systems approaches in voluntary and community organisations

Community Works will commit to the following actions in response to the priorities identified by the sector:

Examine and adjust how Community Works operates to ensure our internal and external work programmes prioritise diversity, equality and inclusion.

Review our training and support provision to encompass the areas needed to meet the challenges identified in the report.

Examine our offer around volunteering as it evolves and the provision of support for VCSE and partners in this area.

Continue infrastructure work, supporting and promoting collaboration and partnership working, exploring new ways of working, enhance shared intelligence in the very early stages of planning and co-designing innovative solutions across sectors (all sectors together) and in different geographical locations.

Remain strategically involved locally, regionally and nationally to bring and share learning both within and across the sectors to inform local success.

Work with partners to explore opportunities for creativity in funding models, sustainability and mixed funding economy to support local populations.

INTRODUCTION

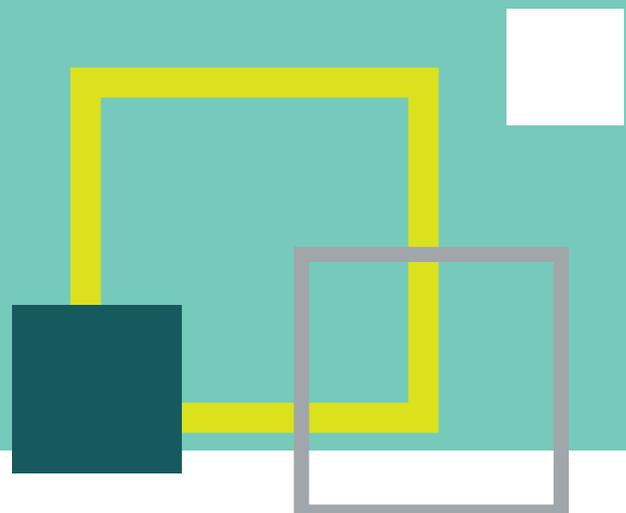
This report is based on the results of an online survey that was designed and distributed by Community Works between 22nd June and 13th July 2020. The aim of the survey was to learn about how the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector situated within Brighton, Hove, Adur and Worthing, responded in the initial months of the Covid-19 pandemic and to explore the learning which could be taken forward from that response to develop future working.

The survey included a mixture of open and closed questions, covering a range of topics including the impact of Covid-19 on: service delivery; service users; the financial health and sustainability of VCSE organisations; volunteering; partnership working; and future delivery and support needs. Respondents were able to complete the survey using an open access weblink (hosted on Survey Monkey), and it was promoted to members of the VCSE sector through social media, direct mailings and wider circulation amongst VCSE and public sector networks.

This report documents the findings from the full data set, which included a quantitative analysis of closed questions as well as the collation and thematic analysis of over 600 qualitative comments. Where quotes have been used, these have been retained in their original form as written by the respondent, except where redactions have been made to preserve anonymity.

The findings presented represent the experiences and reflections of VCSE organisations at a snapshot in time, therefore some of the views and experiences of responding organisations may have shifted or changed as the longevity of the pandemic becomes increasingly apparent. However, this report is an ideal opportunity to pause and reflect on what has been achieved in the first five months of the pandemic, and what has made this possible, in order to ensure that the system is able to build on, and embed, the lessons that have been learnt moving forwards.

As a snapshot, we have preserved and used the language used by respondents in their responses. We acknowledge the challenges and importance of language, and especially terminology when talking about diversity, equality and inclusion. How we communicate effectively and appropriately about diversity, equality and inclusion is an ongoing process. We are listening and learning from members and the wider community and encourage people to share their thoughts with us.



SURVEY SAMPLE

In total 190 responses were received. Of these, thirteen responses provided answers to fewer than four questions and a decision was taken to exclude these from the analysis. Three responses were from organisations outside of the VCSE sector and were excluded from the main analysis. This left a total of 174 responses which were analysed and form the basis of this report.

Responses were received from organisations and groups working in Brighton and Hove, and Adur and Worthing (see figure 1 below). When asked about the specific wards they worked in, the majority worked across all wards (76% of those working in Brighton and Hove worked across all wards, and 73% of those working in Adur and Worthing worked across all wards). Some respondents also reported operating nationally or more widely within Sussex or Surrey. 8 organisations indicated that they worked in both Adur and Worthing and Brighton and Hove.

Figure 1: Geography



Responses were received from a variety of organisations across the VCSE sector, representing organisations of different sizes, structures and fields (see figures 2 to 5 below). Over half of the responses were from relatively small organisations, with 58% having '0-5 members of staff' and 55% having an income of '£100,000 or less'. Over half of the respondents (54%) work with '20 or more' volunteers, and a large number of responses (68%) were from registered charities.

Figure 2: Number of full-time equivalent posts



Figure 3: Number of volunteers

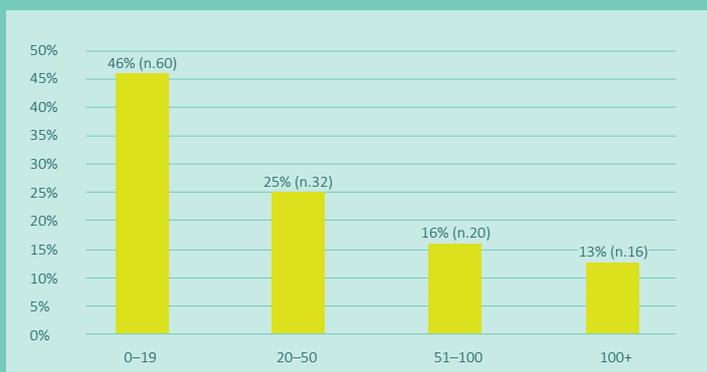


Figure 4: Annual turnover

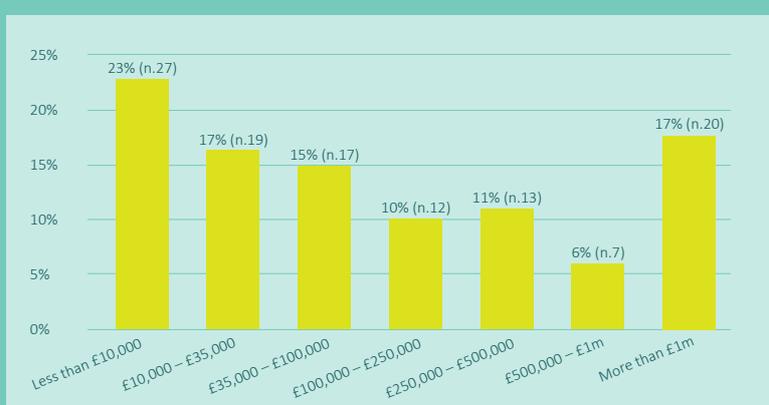


Figure 5: Organisational structure

Structure	By proportion/number
Registered charity	38% (n.45)
Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee	30% (n.35)
Constituted/unincorporated organisation	13% (n.15)
Other (please specify)	8% (n.9)
Community Interest Company (CIC)	5% (n.6)
Community Benefit Society	4% (n.5)
Company limited by guarantee which isn't a registered charity or CIC	2% (n.2)
Community Group (not in any of the above categories)	1% (n.1)

Responses were received from organisations working in a variety of fields, however 69% of all respondents worked in the areas of 'Health and Wellbeing' and 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' (either as their 'primary' field of work or 'other' fields of work).

Figure 6: Primary field of work

Field of work	Primary field of work	Other fields of work
Health and Wellbeing	16% (n.17)	61% (n.63)
Mental Health and Wellbeing	14% (n.15)	53% (n.55)
Environment, Sustainability and Conservation	11% (n.11)	19% (n.20)
Housing / Homelessness	9% (n.9)	22% (n.23)
Information, Advice and Guidance	6% (n.6)	35% (n.36)
Youth Work and Childcare	5% (n.5)	16% (n.17)
Community Development	5% (n.5)	33% (n.34)
Food and Food Poverty	5% (n.5)	24% (n.25)
Arts and Culture	3% (n.3)	16% (n.17)
Training and Education	3% (n.3)	35% (n.36)
Media and IT	3% (n.3)	4% (n.4)
Social Support and Befriending	2% (n.2)	37% (n.38)
Counselling	2% (n.2)	17% (n.18)
Social Justice	2% (n.2)	20% (n.21)
Sports and Physical Activity	2% (n.2)	13% (n.13)
Capacity Building	1% (n.1)	10% (n.10)
Advocacy (including mediation)	1% (n.1)	30% (n.31)
Community Safety	1% (n.1)	15% (n.16)
Facilities Management	1% (n.1)	3% (n.3)
Religious or Spiritual	1% (n.1)	2% (n.2)
Law, Criminal Justice, Human/Civil Rights	1% (n.1)	10% (n.10)
Transport	1% (n.1)	4% (n.4)
Community Enterprise	1% (n.1)	6% (n.6)
Volunteering	0% (n.0)	50% (n.52)
Policy and campaigning	0% (n.0)	22% (n.23)
Representation	0% (n.0)	19% (n.20)
Research, information and development	0% (n.0)	15% (n.16)
Economic wellbeing	0% (n.0)	14% (n.15)
Substance misuse services	0% (n.0)	10% (n.10)
Heritage	0% (n.0)	7% (n.7)
Cultural development	0% (n.0)	7% (n.7)
Consultancy	0% (n.0)	5% (n.5)
Animals	0% (n.0)	3% (n.3)

HOW DID THE VCSE SECTOR RESPOND?

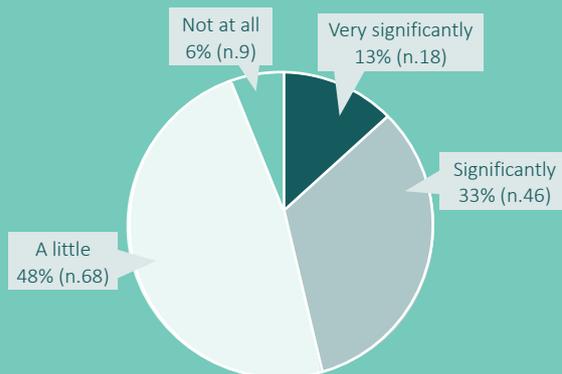
At the time of completing the survey, nearly all of the respondents (91%) were still providing services, with 69% of organisations dealing with increasing or similar levels of demand to usual⁴. However, with the lockdown restrictions in place, and the risks imposed by Covid-19, organisations had to significantly adapt their provision.

For example, 44% of respondents said they could provide their usual level of service only 'a little' or 'not at all' (see figure 7). 94% of respondents also noted that their current delivery model was at risk to some extent, with 46% stating that it was 'significantly' or 'very significantly' at risk (see figure 8). The predominate reason for this was adherence to 'social distancing guidelines' (in 60% of cases) as well as the need to protect the welfare and safety of staff and volunteers, as well as service users. As a result, this led to the closure of many offices – thus requiring a move to remote working – as well as the closure of community venues, thus impacting on numerous drop-in/group-based/community-based services.

Figure 7: The extent to which respondents felt they were able to continue to deliver their usual level of service

	Overall	Adur & Worthing	Brighton & Hove
Very significantly	14% (n.24)	10% (n.3)	22% (n.15)
Significantly	42% (n.72)	39% (n.12)	35% (n.24)
A little	36% (n.62)	48% (n.15)	29% (n.20)
None	8% (n.14)	3% (n.1)	13% (n.9)
I don't know	0	0	0

Figure 8: The extent to which respondents felt their current delivery model was at risk (total responses 141)



⁴ This was particularly the case for organisations supporting 'older people', 'people living with long term physical and mental health conditions', 'people who misuse alcohol, drugs or other substances', 'homeless people' and 'BAMER' communities.

SERVICE ADAPTATIONS

Despite these challenges, over 137 comments were made demonstrating the various ways that VCSE organisations, very rapidly, responded to the needs of their service users and the communities they serve. This response included adapting the delivery of existing services such as:

- Moving to 7 day a week provision.
- Offering weekly telephone support.
- Utilising online technology to support the provision of individual and group-based services.
- Undertaking needs assessments of all existing service users to identify new or changing support needs.
- Providing practical support (such as the delivery of food and meals, as well as supporting the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)) to ensure individuals' basic needs were being met and that communities could keep themselves safe.
- Redeploying staff, or increasing staff hours, to support increased frontline delivery.
- Maintaining or increasing volunteer numbers (in 68% of cases this was possible).
- Implementing new or adapted volunteer programmes and roles.
- Developing online induction and training processes.
- Instigating and enabling social connections between members and service users by continuing to offer, or introducing new, social and recreational activities online.

These responses provide rich examples of service adaptations initiated by members in response to the pandemic.

“

In mid-March we enlisted the support of volunteers from Victim Support and our staff team to call our then 357 scheme members to ask them what they felt they wanted and needed as a result of the forthcoming pandemic. In response we:

- Transitioned our whole service to provide telephone befriending.
- Increased our chaplaincy support providing spiritual care to our members who requested it by 10%.
- Launched our ‘enhanced befriending’ model online to enable us to provide support to older people living with dementia through the provision of resources, supervision and online Zoom sessions with volunteers.
- Operated an emergency food distribution hub since March including emergency care packages and home cooked meals.
- Provided monthly newsletters (instead of 6 monthly) and regular postal communication which we have received very positive feedback about as the information contains helpful tips about how to manage during lockdown, useful signposting information and positive messages of encouragement.
- We increased staff hours by 15% and transitioned a team member to become a Befriending Coordinator to enable us to manage four times more than our usual average of referrals and volunteer applications; We developed a concept called ‘Doorstep pop rounds’ which we trialled and launched in June 2020 once endorsed by Brighton and Hove Public Health.
- We set up intergenerational telephone befriending in partnership with Brighton College.

“

We have a wide variety of services - our staff accommodation is still operating, it has to, but we have reduced numbers of staff on shift during the day. Our face to face counselling services are operating remotely through video calls and telephone calls. Our advice and casework specialist services are doing the same as counselling but also using social media to keep clients informed and supported. To support staff we had to quickly develop clear guidance and have key staff leads to offer support on new (to most) technology.

“

We replaced [our face to face services] with daily health & wellbeing advice /postings on facebook, our website and WhatsApp...;

We run a phone ‘buddying’ system for those women and families for whom there are particular concerns...

We carried out weekly food parcel deliveries in partnership with Al Medinah Mosque and Table Tennis club: We participated in Emergency Food Network and Refugee/Migrant meetings...

We successfully bid for purchase of sewing machines and laptops which have been distributed and ‘loaned’ to women for Network community sewing projects and family use...

We came together through doorstep deliveries and support (some online) to make over 90 Scrub Bags (Bags of Hope) for Sussex County Hospital. We are now running a ‘mask’ project on a similar basis.”

“

We recognised the importance of being able to move quickly to meet increased demand for emergency funding in support of the many and various voluntary activities taking place during the coronavirus lockdown.

Our Trustees immediately introduced a new funding stream with adapted criteria to ensure funds were as easy to access as possible.

Our Covid-19 Emergency grants of up to £250 were made available to local individuals, community and mutual aid groups, and small charities whose aim was to provide support and assistance to vulnerable and isolated individuals and families across Worthing.

“

We have adapted how we deliver services to delivering virtual support and activities, phone support and more 1:1 delivery. We have developed a very successful 'friendship' service via Facebook private group, which now has over 160 members. We offer the virtual delivery of yoga, arts, music etc. and we're now delivering 20 sessions a week via zoom.

“

Closing of office space...Working remotely... introducing new tech - laptop and phones plus equipment for office home use... Introducing Teams via microsoft and Zoom, plus Skype. Adapting the data collection and ensuring that this is cloud based. New support services via phone (assertive contact). Helpline manned remotely. Increased demand met by redeploying policy staff to frontline temporarily and increasing hours for part-time staff team. Developing online closed social media platforms for peer support and engagement messaging etc. We held online tutorials.

NEW SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the adaptation of existing services, throughout the comments there were examples of organisations having developed new services to meet additional or new demands, either by successfully applying to emergency funds, repurposing existing funds or the use of unrestricted income (including reserves).

“

We have dropped all face to face activities and repurposed volunteers and taken new ones now offering a completely new set of services. These include shopping, telephone befriending, online activities and postal activities - none of which we offered before, all of which we will continue to offer.

“

We developed a new programme...for new mothers. This is particularly pertinent in recent months as new mothers are giving birth in hospital in fear of catching Covid-19, and are not having face-to-face/practical professional and extended family support when they get home.

We also heard from numerous organisations who had worked hard to provide essential hardware to service users to mitigate the problems associated with digital exclusion.

“

We have been getting people onto the internet as quickly as possible and getting them tablets and laptops when we can. This way they have...a way of staying in contact with services, friends and family.

VCSE organisations also communicated regularly with their members and service users to provide up-to-date signposting information as well as to enhance the accessibility of, and thus adherence to, public health information.

“

We worked with BHCC to disseminate this vital information to local communities – there was a complete absence of relevant government translated information.

“

The absence of clear and translated messages and guidance has meant many people have remained inside and fearful and not attended important health and wellbeing appointments where they have continued to be delivered. Word of mouth plays an important role in BAMER communities and we have worked tirelessly to provide information and language support. The trust we have built over decades means that we are uniquely placed to deliver appropriate reassurance and guidance.

“

We have responded daily to the latest Government and Public Health information; making sure the information is posted in ways that can be understood, including in Arabic and other languages if need be and explaining the implications of what is required. In that way we think we have help keep people safe, by increasing their understanding of what is required and in complying.

There were also many examples of VCSE organisations having worked proactively with local, regional and national strategic partners to feed into, and inform, local responses through: sharing knowledge and intelligence; advocating for the needs of marginalised communities; and contributing capacity and resource to the collective effort.

“

Our Social Prescribing team were part of the core team to staff the Community Hub, providing essential skilled staff to resource that new system... We co-designed the volunteer shopping element of the Food response with Community Hub/ASC through detailed conversations with ASC colleagues about how the referral system would work, how we could share data, how we could input directly into the CRM that they'd designed to provide the Community Hub... We were also one of the orgs whose work on [money handling for volunteers] was shared via BHCC and CW. We reached out to other orgs nationally and compiled our process from that plus local BHCC ASC internal process, and then shared that via CW and BHCC as well as (I think!) on twitter with other who'd expressed an interest.

“

Our partnerships/memberships with national & local organisations have been increasingly important to us in terms of giving/receiving specific information relating to our service. Examples include Homeless Link, Centrepoin, BHCC HRS providers network. Other national and local organisations have been important to us in terms of giving/receiving universal information. Examples include NCVO, ACEVO, A Better Way network, and Community Works CEO network.

Finally, respondents gave examples of having worked collaboratively with existing partnerships, or establishing new partnerships, in order to contribute towards a coordinated, joined-up and efficient response.

“

We redirected resource from CCG funded work on SP to support the Community Hub, this meant that no intervention was happening in isolation, a benefit of us providing both services. SP Plus - we negotiated additional funds for SP Plus partner organisations from the CCG to do Covid support outreach, building on SP Plus work in last 3 years.

“

We started a weekly Zoom call for VCS organisations supporting refugees and migrants to help coordinate their response.

Overall, it was clear that many respondents adapted in multiple ways; whilst some work was coming to a halt, other services were being reconfigured or, in some cases, new services developed. The response of the sector, described in respondents accounts was characterised by innovation and agility, underpinned by a closeness to service users. This multifaceted response enabled organisations to shift resources and working practices to address individual and communities' most pressing and immediate needs.

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE SECTOR'S RESPONSE HAD SO FAR?

IMPACT ON SERVICE USERS

Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact they believe their response has had on their service users and/or the communities they serve.

“

Reduction in isolation - across all ages. Covid left many fearful, anxious and at risk of becoming totally isolated. Older people rely on our services for social contact and support, we have managed to maintain this and ensure people have remained connected to their friends and staff. We have been able to reduce anxiety caused by Covid and to ensure people are safe at home with all they need. We have been able to support in various ways around food and nutrition ensuring all have been able to maintain a reasonable diet. Our activity packs have helped to keep minds active and given a talking point for telephone conversations. Our exercise classes have ensured people keep moving and continue with their strengthening exercises to maintain mobility and reduce the likelihood of falling. Many have learned new IT skills which are helping them to keep in contact with support and family members.

“

For the people who use our services, and for the particularly vulnerable, we managed to provide a service which supported them through the lockdown and the toughest of times... We made 4334 calls over the period... just to have a chat and check how they are, which meant a lot to many and we got some good feedback from this activity. We continued to offer a service based from our homes which has also allowed us to continue much of our usual activities but in new ways as the organisation had invested in Tech over the last few years to allow us to be able to work from anywhere.

These two quotes, selected from over 137 comments, illustrate the positive impact that VCSE organisations have had on mental health, reducing loneliness and isolation, and ensuring that individuals' basic needs are being met (including the provision and delivery of food and medication). Having analysed the full range of responses, it is apparent that the VCSE sector's response has contributed towards:

Meeting the basic needs of individuals and communities (for example the planning and delivery of food parcels to the most vulnerable).

Helping communities to stay safe by increasing the awareness and accessibility of, and thus adherence to, public health guidance.

Ensuring that the social and emotional needs of the most at risk, the most vulnerable and the most isolated, were actively addressed.

Increasing community access to Personal and Protective Equipment (e.g. through the making of masks).

Ensuring those at risk of digital exclusion were considered in service planning and delivery.

Some respondents also noted the positive impact that shifting to online delivery has had, particularly for those service users who prefer to access services in these ways. A few respondents also commented on the reduced levels of stress they have witnessed in some of their service users, including for example young people who attend educational institutions or client groups who are subject to regimes of monitoring and

reporting (such as refugees or the unemployed), which have been suspended or loosened during the pandemic.

However, these positive accounts were set against an acute awareness of the many challenges and negative impacts that Covid-19 – and thus the unavoidable loss or adaptation of services – is having on service users.

“

The closure of our service has left a huge gap in clients lives who used clinics as part of their ‘recovery’, to keep them well, to keep them from relapse, to have some social contact in an otherwise isolated world.

“

For our clients and service users it has been incredibly disruptive and has affected their mental health and stress levels. Many of our elderly customers have found the changes very difficult as the regular healthy living programme was their way of meeting and being with people.

“

Our clients - mainly with Mental health and substance use issues are impacted very negatively by this pandemic. The ‘isolation’ and withdrawal of services to encourage them to ‘seek help’ have huge consequences - and lasting issues of relapse.

The impact that existing patterns of vulnerability, marginalization and exclusion have had on people’s negative experiences of the pandemic were also widely noted. This was particularly noticeable when one looked at those organisations who were experiencing increasing demand for their services, as this was particularly the case amongst those organisations supporting ‘older people’, ‘people living with long term physical and mental health conditions’, ‘people who misuse alcohol, drugs or other substances’, ‘homeless people’ and ‘BAMER communities’.

“

Due to health and income inequalities, information around health and wellbeing as well as information on where to go for help did not reach most of [the recent refugee and asylum seeker community]. They don’t always have tech such as computers and are often lacking in online searching skills.

“

BAMER communities have been particularly affected: many, particularly women and girls, did not leave their homes for weeks because they were aware of the greater impact of Covid-19 on BAMER people, and/or because of information and rumours from various sources, including from ‘home’ countries. This increased dependence on food deliveries. Covid rules were not fully understood and misunderstandings were sometimes reinforced by rumours that police had draconian powers to track and arrest people. The challenge of communicating accurate information was exacerbated by digital exclusion. This particularly affected asylum seekers in HMO dispersal accommodation, as the Home Office provides neither TV nor internet.

“

We think that the elderly, single parent families and children/young adults were particularly affected. They were less likely to have access to technology that was fit for purpose, they may have lacked a safe space, have little to no appropriate communication from a consistent support network, and were more likely to be coping with existing mental or physical challenges.

“

We have a significant number of people with learning difficulties, mental health needs, existing physical health conditions, experience of substance use, previous homelessness and we have older people - who have found the Covid-19 crisis extremely difficult. Many of these people were already suffering food poverty before the Covid-19 emergency, thus they were particularly effected by the Covid medical, food supply and economic crisis.

IMPACT OF COLLECTIVE, CROSS-SECTOR RESPONSES

The survey findings demonstrate the essential contribution that VCSE organisations have made in supporting and informing public sector responses, such as health services, emergency services and council services. Specifically, 50% of respondents had been involved in a range of local, national and regional agencies and/or partnerships throughout the pandemic to date (see figure 9 below), and 43% gave examples of having being involved in new, or strengthened, partnerships.

As one respondent noted, “...it has brought us closer together and has given us a clear and urgent focus to work collaboratively.”

Figure 9: Organisations involved in cross sector emergency response planning

Responses	By proportion/number
National planning agencies and statutory services	15% (n.17)
Regional planning agencies and statutory services	10% (n.11)
Local area e.g. councils, NHS, ambulance services, Community Works or other VCS support organisations	34% (n.38)
Neighbourhood/Ward responses e.g. with local networks including health networks and services, housing networks	14% (n.16)
Local community groups e.g. emergency support planning	31% (n.35)
Involvement in NHS responder initiative and/or Community Hubs	37% (n.45)
None of the above	50% (n.56)

Within the qualitative comments (over 80 comments were made), there was evidence to suggest that cross-sector partnership working has led to the co-design of systems and processes that have enabled the needs of the most vulnerable to be swiftly identified and addressed. In particular, there were examples of organisations having:

Advocated for the needs of the most vulnerable or marginalised.

Shared knowledge and intelligence regarding the needs of the most vulnerable community members.

Established joint referral pathways that took account of each other's strengths.

Committed to establishing clear and open lines of communication across sectors.

As a result, a range of collective relief efforts have been supported, resulting in the saving of lives as well as the provision of essential support that complemented the provision of statutory services, thus preventing the system from becoming overwhelmed with ever increasing need.

The quotes that follow give an idea of the scale of partnership working to address entrenched inequalities that have been intensified by the pandemic:

“

We have remained plugged into local statutory and voluntary sector virtual networks and tried to ensure that issues relating to refugee and migrant individuals and communities are clearly on the radar of these providers and that their responses are appropriate.

“

Adur and Worthing [Councils] contacted us to ask us to act as a lead provider for their referrals for people in need of long-term befriending which we were happy to accommodate. Within the first 4 weeks of this process we held weekly meetings with key staff to manage the new portal being used for referrals.

“

We provided best practice support and strategic support with volunteering and contributed staff time to the Adur and Worthing Community Hub and feedback on its development. In Adur and Worthing we supported local foodbanks delivering as part of the Community Hub and have now set up a Food Partnership and secured funding to further develop the partnership and food offer.

“

We worked in partnership with Brighton and Hove County Council (BHCC), Ageing Well and Together Co via the Food Cell Partnership, with 45 other community-based organisations that came together to form the Covid-19 emergency food network (which was an extension of the emergency food network that we ran before Covid-19 that had 20 ish projects in). We've also worked in partnership with surplus food organisations and we've made links to restaurants to redistribute surplus food...

We've also had involvement with DEFRA, Sustain and Food Foundation to campaign for school meal vouchers, access to priority supermarket slots for vulnerable people, and more funding/income for emergency food work.

“

[we]... quickly reacted to be able to take increased referrals including from the Community Hub and to take these directly. Our team had the knowledge skills and resources to take a significant workload from BHCC.

There was evidence also of new collaborative approaches across sectors, initiated by our members to encourage partners to pool existing intelligence and resources to support those who were among the most excluded. These examples demonstrate the willingness of the sector to flex and create person-focused solutions in a systemic way, with VCSE involvement:

“

We persuaded Brighton and Hove CCG that we could calibrate our service user data with that held by GP Surgeries to target support for those with language support needs who were receiving shielding letters in English. This is resulting in wellbeing calls to vulnerable patients.

“

We have supported the local councils, schools and health services to think through, tailor and prioritise their SEND-specific responses to the coronavirus crisis.

WHAT HAS ENABLED THE SECTOR TO RESPOND IN THIS WAY?

During the survey, respondents were asked to reflect on the key features of the VCSE sector, which have enabled organisations to rapidly respond in the face of significant crisis. A total of 89 comments were made, six of which are included below.

“

We're values-based organisations; we see people as part of the solution rather than the problem; Use strength/asset-based models of working; Tend to be more agile & less bureaucratic; don't rely on centralised power; Led by cross section of people including those with lived experience; Able to build on existing relationships with stakeholders.

“

Staff motivation has been key. From my point of view, staff really care about their work and ensuring that people we work with get the support they need to stay healthy both physical and mentally. This meant that staff pulled out the stops, worked extra hours, changed their work patterns, were flexible in what tasks they carried out (not just following their job description)... Staff in our charity have a lot of control over their work, can see what works, what doesn't work and can adapt their work to meet the needs of services users and the requirements of funders in order to do the best job possible. I think that this flexibility and control has been key to enabling an agile and effective response.

“

The sector is flexible, creative and innovative. The sector is geared to share good practice and successes enabling change to cascade throughout. The sector has strong partnership links and does not work in silos therefore planning and adapted services are formed within partnerships. The sector is client/patient/service user/community driven and can step back and listen to the ideas, needs and experiences of the users... the sector is also agile enough to react quickly to emerging need and not weighed down with bureaucracy and audit through different department streams.

“

...[there was a] willingness to communicate with each other, work in a collegiate way, try new approaches, and to listen to people.

“

We have healthy cash balances. We take a medium to long term strategic view. We are able to flex services. We have strong governance and management arrangements in place and capacity to innovate and change.

“

We are confident what we deliver meets the needs of the most vulnerable and that we do this making best use of resources, in partnerships, which bring the best use of organisations' skills and resources and therefore bring best value.

Upon analysis of the open comments, the following aspects emerged as being some of the key factors that enabled the sector to respond rapidly to the needs of individuals and communities throughout the pandemic:

- Trusted by and closeness to service users.
- Reach into diverse communities.
- Value-driven approach.
- Committed, passionate and motivated workforce (both paid and voluntary).
- Strong governance, management and leadership structures.
- Sound financial management.
- Strength of existing relationships, and willingness to work in partnership, with statutory partners, funders and other VCSE organisations.
- Relevant, needs-led service provision.

The role that funders and the range of VCSE infrastructure organisations played in enabling organisations to respond was also noted.

“

Funders such as the Sussex Community Foundation made applying for crisis funding easy and achievable even though I was busy on the front line.

“

Sussex Community Foundation have provided fast and flexible grant funding which has been amazing.

“

We have ensured that local residents have food to eat. We have liaised continuously with the council - through one community engagement officer and the councillors who attend our committee meetings. We have liaised with the Trust for Developing Communities and the Brighton and Hove Food partnership as members of the Emergency Food Network. We have informed them of on the front-line experience of delivery emergency food to a very needy population

“

.... we helped to design and print newsletters distributed all over the city by volunteers, as part of a joint initiative between Brighton & Hove City Council, Trust for Developing Communities and other local community projects....” a project including the Resource Centre in Brighton.

“

The frequent emails from Community Works which gave updates and information were of great help and many of our volunteers appreciated receiving them. Links included in these emails were extremely useful as they covered a wide range of community issues and concerns.

“

Community Works has been magnificent in this, drawing on our long-nurtured set of partnerships, structures, ways of working that we are all committed to.

Overall, this combination of factors was felt to have contributed to the sector’s agility, flexibility, and creativity. They also provided a basis of trust upon which VCSE organisations were able to listen to, identify, and effectively advocate for, the needs of different communities.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR THE SECTOR TO REMAIN STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE?

Key challenges VCSE organisations have faced during the pandemic

Alongside the positive stories of adaptation and collaboration, the survey findings highlight some of the challenges the sector has faced.

Income: Just over half (51%) of respondents experienced a loss of income between April and June 2020, with almost a quarter (22%) losing either 50% or ‘more than 50%’ of their income. When thinking about the next financial year, 44% of respondents also believe they will experience a loss of income.

Figure 10: Proportion of income that has been lost between 1 April – 30 June 2020

	Overall	Adur & Worthing	Brighton & Hove
0%	26% (n.33)	31% (n.9)	22% (n.15)
10%	17% (n.22)	14% (n.4)	19% (n.13)
25%	12% (n.15)	10% (n.3)	13% (n.9)
50%	9% (n.12)	10% (n.3)	9% (n.6)
More than 50%	13% (n.17)	21% (n.6)	12% (n.8)
I don’t Know	23% (n.29)	14% (n.4)	25% (n.17)

Figure 11: Proportion of income organisations expect to lose in this financial year

	Overall	Adur & Worthing	Brighton & Hove
0%	12% (n.16)	13% (n.4)	11% (n.8)
10%	12% (n.15)	10% (n.3)	13% (n.9)
25%	14% (n.18)	3% (n.1)	14% (n.10)
50%	5% (n.7)	10% (n.3)	4% (n.3)
More than 50%	13% (n.17)	19% (n.6)	13% (n.9)
It’s too early to tell	28% (n.36)	36% (n.11)	24% (n.17)
I don’t know	16% (n.21)	10% (n.3)	20% (n.14)

In particular, income raised through fundraising and donations is felt to be most at risk, given the cancellation of significant fundraising events. (Figure 12)

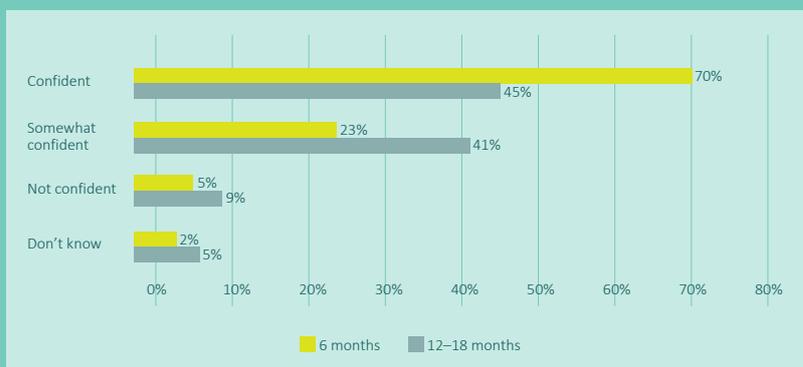
Figure 12: Income streams most at risk

Income streams	By Proportion/number
Trading	25% (n.31)
Trusts	25% (n.31)
Fundraising	57 (n.70)
Donations	45% (n.55)
Legacies	4% (n.5)
Other	39% (n.48)

In addition, 39% of respondents have had to draw on their reserves to support their response, such as increasing staffing hours, purchasing IT equipment to support remote working, and offering emergency provisions to service users.

However, at the time of distributing the survey, not all organisations had been affected financially. This was particularly true for some of the very small organisations that have low overheads, along with those who had successfully secured funds through emergency grants. There was also a significant degree of confidence amongst respondents regarding the survival of their organisations, with 93% and 86% being 'confident' or 'somewhat confident' of their survival in the next 6 months and the next 12-18 months respectively. (Figure 13)

Figure 13: Confidence in short and mid-term survival (128 responses)



However, when reflecting on the next 12-18 months, there was a significant reduction in the numbers of respondents stating they were 'confident' of their survival compared to the next six months, with confidence levels falling from 70% (n.90) to 45% (n.57); this is as a result of the degree of uncertainty that continues to exist as well as concerns about the long-term impact that Covid-19 is likely to have on service provision, service demand, and the funding market as a whole.

“

Given the impact upon the economy and employment, I think it is unlikely that donations and client payments will recover as people are less likely to have disposable income. Grants may also be affected longer term due to the demand upon them. The grants that rely on the stock market may be impacted. We are finding the grants are focusing upon Covid only, which makes core costs difficult to get.

“

Thinking about next financial year, we do not have funding in place or the prospect of funding for some aspects of our work. We remain largely funded by public sector grants and contracts and there is so much uncertainty about that. One of our main services is due to be recommissioned next year, but we do not know if it will be, or to what extent.

“

I am concerned that with an economic crisis looming and the glut of short-term Covid-specific funding now available, there will be less funding available in 2021-22 - especially core funding.

“

We have been successful in raising some immediate funds, both restricted and unrestricted, to enable us to meet increased costs and expanded service delivery during this period; but the longer-term funding landscape is precarious, with many of the larger funders to whom we would have hoped to apply for core funding now pausing applications and focussing their efforts on supporting existing grantees.

During the survey it was also notable that, whilst the majority of respondents have been able to maintain their volunteer base in terms of numbers, 30% of organisations noted a decrease. The main reasons for this were the closure or suspension of some volunteer led services or in which volunteers had played a key role, as well as volunteers needing to shield.

“

It may be temporary but with some of our service being closed we are not working with our volunteers at this time.

“

Our volunteers' roles were mainly to support the team during our drop ins and groups with eg hospitality/ making teas, befriending. These roles have changed. Our admin volunteer may be able to do some admin from home, but it will be limited.

“

Our volunteering programme currently relies upon volunteers coming into the office. The over 70s were not able to do this during lockdown, reducing our volunteers by 1/3, effecting service.

Other respondents also noted a significant change in the landscape of volunteering during the immediate months of the pandemic, both in terms of the type of individuals coming forwards to offer their time and support, as well as volunteers' willingness or capacity to support the delivery of increasingly digital services.

“

We have recruited 33 new volunteers to run the food bank and community shopping services. This has enabled food bank users in our area to have the food that they need. We were able to do this because many people were off work during the crisis. Many of our volunteers came from highly-skilled employment.

“

We were approached by women wanting to help us. In the main these were women who were furloughed from their employment and wanted to make the best use of their time. They were also younger women so able to be 'out and about' and delivering items to those who were self-isolating.

“

...with the move to online groups, there simply hasn't been the need for them, especially early on when we were figuring out how and what the online groups would look like. We've been able to offer some volunteer slots in these groups now.

“

Volunteer Digital Champions have been providing remote digital support for vulnerable people needing help to access online services.

“

Some volunteers are not very technology-literate and do not feel confident to offer digital support, even with the offer of training. Some are reluctant to digitally support clients they had never met before... Other volunteers have taken to supporting clients digitally and have asked to support more than one client as they no longer have to account for travelling time.

At times, managing and supporting the influx of volunteers and/or training and inducting volunteers to adapt to new working practices, has also been challenging.

“

We had a huge surge of community support offering befriending and took on as many new volunteers in lockdown as we did in the previous year. Whilst brilliant this has impacted our capacity for client and volunteer support and unless we are able to secure extra funding to manage the extra workload will have to look carefully at how we manage the safety aspects of this large a number of cases.

“

It has impacted significantly on the work of the management committee of the community association as we have had to recruit, train and supervise a very large number of volunteers that we didn't use to have.

“

Providing adequate support and engagement with staff and volunteers to develop new ways of working alongside the challenges of working remotely has been essential and also time consuming.

Overall, having identified some of the sector's key challenges, it suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic is creating a considerable degree of uncertainty for VCSE organisations regarding their mid to long-term future in terms of funding, service delivery models and the mid to long term implications on the volunteering landscape.

PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARDS

Towards the end of the survey, respondents were asked to reflect on 1) the wider implications that Covid-19 is having on their organisations and the people and communities they support, and 2) on their support needs moving forwards. Based on an analysis of these reflections, the following three priorities emerged:

- Supportive funding structures
- Collaborative working
- Addressing social and structural inequalities

Supportive funding structures

Over three quarters of respondents called for core, unrestricted funding to ensure they can continue to respond and adapt in agile, flexible and creative ways, in line with arising needs. Given reductions in other unrestricted income sources, such as fundraising and donations, respondents noted how important core funding will be going forwards, providing them with the breathing space they need to continue to invest in service redesign as well as their internal infrastructure.

“

I think almost every community group or voluntary organisation that I know struggles from lack of funding for core costs. You cannot rely on volunteers alone, you need someone at least who is paid to manage volunteers, knows your organisation well and can be relied upon to provide regular and solid back up. I've been part of a voluntary organisation for 11 years now and this has always been our major stumbling block to delivering projects, events and providing continuity with our services. We need to cover basic running costs, like websites, insurance, publicity etc so that instead of spending a lot of our time just trying to survive, we can do what we need to get on with and what our organisation was designed to tackle. At basic survival level, it's hard to come up with creative solutions.

“

[Funders] need to contribute to core costs and fund additional volume of work. We need space to do work on redesign of services etc. Respect our experience, don't stipulate what needs to be done and how we report on it

Significantly, there was a call for flexible funding and responsive measurement and evaluation to be built into funding agreements that encourages dynamic development of services using the learning through delivery.

“

Fund core costs – it enables us to be agile and respond to need. This is more important than getting stuck on fixed outputs agreed in funding agreements 2-3 years ago.”

In addition to core funding, some respondents called for funders not to penalise organisations for reduced outputs or underspend that may arise as a direct impact of the pandemic, and to ensure that funding structures are designed in such a way that the assets and strengths held by smaller, grassroots organisations are acknowledged and included in design and development of solutions.

“

We will have an underspend on direct costs like volunteer and staff expenses which we have secured restricted funding for. There is the risk that funders will ask for this restricted unspent money back at the end of the year...That will leave us with a deficit in meeting indirect costs such as office rent.

“

Commissioners need to be aware of the smaller groups / projects that give a huge impact above the financial support they get. The 'one big contract' excludes the variety of smaller groups who remain un-funded and unrecognised.

There was also a call to invest in preventative/early intervention services and to reduce the 'hoops' organisations need to jump through in order to access funding. There was a desire expressed to allow a parity of status to inform funding relationships as a more collaborative process, sharing power in the funding relationship and the design of solutions to engage those most in need as one system.

“

There will be a temptation to cut preventative services save money but this is damaging short term and long term but by discussing how we could save money we could come up with better cost effective solutions without cutting services.

“

We need to think as a system and ensure that the services in the VCSE sector that focus on earlier intervention, or that work with families or service users who don't engage in statutory services, are supported and integrated into recovery planning, otherwise we may find that this fuels the numbers of people who may find themselves in crisis through service disconnect.

“

Don't make us jump through hundreds of hoops and input days of work to access tender opportunities.

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Throughout the survey findings, the scale and impact of cross sector partnership working has been noted, and there is a palpable willingness for this to continue. There were numerous examples of collaborative working which started as a way to tackle presenting issues but which are evolving to consider new approaches to key systemic issues:

“

Other partnerships have sprung up in response to Covid-19. For example, the Brighton and Hove Covid-19 Migrant Support Group, facilitated by Sanctuary on Sea, which began by co-ordinating emergency food distribution to migrants in the city and has now developed into a working group looking at and advocating on broader issues including housing and homelessness, access to healthcare and mental healthcare, digital exclusion etc.

The introduction of flexibilities to existing funding relationships and partnership working supported adaptive ways of responding to emerging situations. Flexibility in delivery, funding, where and how development happens, in who leads and how they lead, in the ability to allow change are principles that can enhance future collaboration.

“

Bring VCSE into planning processes early. The VCSE sector provides a key perspective in development of strategy as well as operational models. Put aside notions of conflict of interest as providers in commissioning processes and trust VCSE to bring sophistication to their contributions. Provide seats at key strategic discussions. Recognise the scope and value of VCSE delivery and its holistic nature. Create equitable relationships of trust with VCSE partners. Treat VCSE as partners of equal value. Recognise VCSE can bring community voice in different ways

To build on this type of progress, and to prevent it from becoming 'tokenistic', respondents called for:

Equitable, trusting relationships underpinned by transparent, open and clear lines of communication.

Involvement by statutory services of VCSE organisations from the start of the planning process, 'to work in a collegiate way, to try new approaches, listen to people'.

Principles to enhance future collaboration: flexibility in delivery and in funding; where and how development happens, in who leads and how they lead, in the ability to allow dynamic change out of shared learning.

Representation and involvement of a variety of communities and organisations in the development of strategic as well as operational models, developing experimental approaches.

Awareness, recognition and respect for each other's strengths and contribution and how the VCSE can bring community voice in different ways.

“

Involve us in discussions in the early stages and ensure all relevant staff have an understanding of the breadth of expertise and potential in the sector which can be utilised.

“

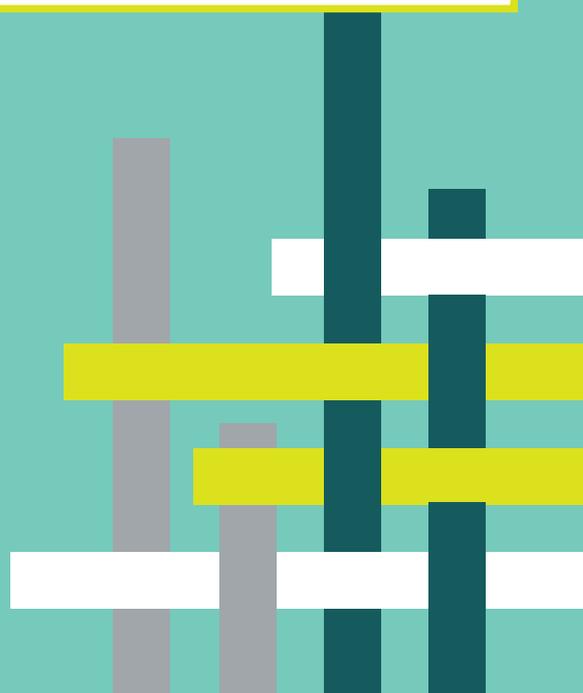
Ensure we are taking part in all aspects of the recovery plan. Engage with us to gather intelligence. Acknowledge the differing challenges of vulnerable groups...Do not dictate but work with us... Value the sector as a trusted partner.

“

In the case of shared statutory sector/VCS partnership in the delivery of services, it should also include not just one selected VCS partner, but a coalition of VCS groups of various sizes and background.

“

To support system change, all parties must be brought into the discussion at the earliest opportunity and not as a tokenistic gesture and a nod to 'good practice'.



ADDRESSING SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

Inequality has been amplified by Covid-19. Respondents talked about the need to tackle the social and structural inequalities that have been exacerbated by Covid-19, to build on the lessons that are being learnt about the significant consequences of entrenched inequality. The learning should lead us as a system to examine those areas where people are disadvantaged and excluded or impacted negatively by the methods in which services are developed and offered, without the voices of those experiencing the greatest injustices being able to inform solutions. Respondents told us:

“

The biggest impact is on poorer families with limited accommodation and facilities. *Tackling inequality is the biggest need.*

“

The spotlight that Covid-19 has shone on the fragility of our food system and the numbers of people who needed emergency food support means that there is a lot of interest in the ‘what next’ question.

“

More support from the council for the BAMER community with clear actions and implementation of a strategy that offers support and actions for tackling inequalities.

“

There is a much greater societal understanding of the issues of loneliness and isolation since Covid which we hope will inform future design.

The importance of bringing in the voices of various interest groups and communities at an early stage in processes such as co-design, co-delivery was stressed repeatedly throughout the survey responses.

“

The Council - and VCS - need to be better at engaging refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants in the development and delivery of policies and services.’

“

More services for young people to access mental health support is vital moving forward, with minority groups being very much part of the design and delivery of this support.

A collective response to tackling inequality provides a shared purpose for sectors to continue to work together in the face of diminishing resources.



SUMMARY

Throughout the survey responses, there is a strong indication that organisations expect to retain many of the changes and adaptations they have made to service delivery and working practices, with many anticipating a ‘blended’ approach to combining new approaches to delivery with traditional ones. However, not all respondents found adapting to online delivery easy or appropriate for many of their service users. There were also some respondents who did not have such a positive experience of partnership working as has currently been presented.

As such, it is clear that the sector will need support in order that it can navigate, and remain strong, in this new operating context. In particular, this may involve support to:

Continue service delivery and development and support increased and new demand.

Share best practice with regards to service delivery and redesign; managing and delivering online and/or blended services.

Investment for volunteering programmes.

Build on the relationships and partnerships that have been essential during this time.

Remain financially sustainable .

Demonstrate and articulate the positive impact and value of services.

Invest in the skills and expertise of its workforce (both paid and voluntary) to enable it to continue to provide high quality, and much needed, support to a diverse range of individuals and communities.

COMMUNITY WORKS – A CALL TO ACTION

“

There has been a flexibility and relaxation of bureaucracy during the initial emergency COVID response which has set up relationships and discussions which were previously inaccessible to VCSE. There is a temptation to return to ‘normal’ and find stability in familiar structures which should be resisted. The new reality is one of increased need, budget gaps and funding issues but that should be resolved by more interaction and more open exploration of what is possible. The positive developments during COVID of new ways of working and flex are the only way to create a better response to the need and challenge which is coming.

The findings presented in this report document what has been, in many ways, a humanitarian response, driven by the need to save lives and protect the most vulnerable in society. It has been a response that has required:

Commitment, dedication and hard work from many.

Collation and sharing of local knowledge and intelligence across sectors.

Bringing together capacity, skills and resources from across sectors.

Collaborative, thoughtful and decisive leadership to enable organisations to respond rapidly and work together where needed.

A strong, vibrant and resilient VCSE sector that was ready and equipped to respond.

An adaptability and versatility that has embraced and supported emerging models through community action.

The survey findings provide substantial evidence regarding the essential and vital contribution that VCSE organisations have made, and continue to make, in relation to providing for people's basic needs (such as food security) and ensuring that the physical and emotional health of individuals across all communities is considered and protected.

It provides examples and feedback that we should use to celebrate the fact that the sector was ready to respond quickly, in new ways, to unprecedented challenges alongside partners. This has been possible because of a long and established tradition of investment in relational working, financial sustainability, business and strategic planning, offering trusted, relevant services and placing values and communities at the heart of development and delivery.

Established partnership working with our funders and strategic partners is key to maintaining a strong sector, allowing independence of voice to inform approaches to meet the changing needs of our communities as we move through stages of the pandemic and into the emerging reality. This is a reality of uncertainty and a shifting landscape for the VCSE and our statutory services but, as a sector, we have advanced many plans at speed. We have also seen the emergence of many new groups and Mutual Aid organisations in Adur and Worthing and Brighton and Hove.⁵ We are already seeking ways to continue to build on the successes and blend our approaches in this new world.

The variety of organisations that took part in this survey- half of responses being from relatively small organisations across a geographic spread encompassing Adur and Worthing, Brighton and Hove- provide Community Works, the VCSE and our statutory sector partners, with rich intelligence to shape our future work.

We recognise that individuals, organisations and geographies have experienced the pandemic in a multitude of ways. There is work to do to ensure Community Works listens to all members and includes multiple perspectives when developing our plans.

⁵ The data has been collected on 9 November 2020 from the Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK map 12 Mutual Aid groups in Adur and Worthing, 50 in Brighton and Hove

We call on our partners within the VCSE, across statutory services and the private sector to work with us, and each other, to develop actions that urgently tackle the priorities identified within this report by:

Respecting, celebrating and valuing the contribution of each sector, developing a 'shared sense of purpose to encourage a person-centred approach based on need a or and better understanding between all parties'⁶.

Committing to open, honest and transparent dialogue across sectors.

Committing to social justice and equality.

Acknowledging the vital role the VCSE sector has played whilst recognising that the principle that investing in a healthy, vibrant and connected sector is essential.

To support VCSE with continued relationship development between/across sectors to encourage more 'experimentation' in co-designing solutions, pooling resources, co-designing funding/commissioning processes.

Community Works will commit to the following actions in response to the priorities identified by the sector:

Examine and adjust how Community Works operates to ensure our internal and external work programmes prioritise diversity, equality and inclusion.

Review our training and support provision to encompass the areas needed to meet the challenges identified in the report.

Examine our offer around volunteering as it evolves and the provision of support for VCSE and partners in this area.

Continue infrastructure work; supporting and promoting collaboration and partnership working, exploring new ways of working, enhance shared intelligence in the very early stages of planning and co-designing innovative solutions across sectors (all sectors together) and places.

Remain strategically involved locally, regionally and nationally to bring and share learning into the sector and across sectors to inform local success.

Work with partners to explore opportunities for creativity in funding models, sustainability and mixed funding economy to support local populations.

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⁶ Trust, power and collaboration; Human Learning Systems approaches in voluntary and community organisations

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

<https://www.ivar.org.uk/research-report/trust-power-and-collaboration/>

<https://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/We-were-built-for-this-Locality-2020.06.13.pdf>

Danny Kruger - Levelling Up Our Communities

Building Collaborative Places: Infrastructure for System Change

<https://www.seshealthandcare.org.uk/2020/10/turn-information-into-action-say-new-reports-from-local-community-organisations/>

The Road Ahead 2020 -<https://publications.ncvo.org.uk/road-ahead-2020/>

